

the thread on these occasions when the author spends a stretch attacking written constitutions without any clear connection to constitutional idolatry.

These quibbles aside, *Constitutional Idolatry and Democracy* is a thought-provoking and timely work that presents its case in an accessible manner. Aspects of the author's argument against constitutional idolatry have previously been surveyed by other scholars, but the strength of the book is in its integration of these various arguments into a sustained, coherent critique of constitutional veneration. While the author's own attempts at original empirical analysis are not sufficiently rigorous to support some of his claims, the bulk of the book uses existing empirical research to good effect, providing ample evidence to substantiate the downsides of constitutional reverence. Although the book treats constitutional idolatry broadly as a global phenomenon, and thus is of interest to comparative constitutional scholars in any country, it is of particular interest to scholars in the United States and the United Kingdom. These two national contexts serve as the primary examples through which the author explicates the pathologies of constitutional idolatry (the United States) and highlights alternative approaches (the United Kingdom).

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The narrow corridor: States, societies, and the fate of liberty

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson

Penguin, New York, NY 2020. 576 pp. \$20.00 (paper)

What is the state's role in economic development? Why did Europe conquer the world? Can liberal democracy rise to the challenge of resurgent populism? These are but a few of the questions Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson tackle in *The Narrow Corridor (TNC)*, a sequel to *Why Nations Fail* (2012). Theoretically ambitious works often raise as many questions as they answer; indeed, new questions can be their most important contribution. *TNC* is no exception, but the questions it raises are probably not those its authors set out to stimulate in the minds of their readers.

What gives the book its title is Acemoglu and Robinson's conjecture that human liberty and prosperity, which for the authors are all but inseparable, flourish in the "narrow corridor" where the powers of state and society are evenly matched. By liberty they mean the absence of domination—subjection to a capricious alien will—which springs from "any relation of unequal

power” (p. 6). At first glance, this understanding of liberty sets a high standard: relations of dominance are commonplace even in the world’s rich democracies. In practice the authors apply this standard inconsistently, relaxing it whenever its rigorous application might raise discomfiting questions about a society they want to portray as being “in the corridor.” We also learn that despite the putative link between the two, liberty sometimes follows a society’s entrance into the corridor at a respectful distance—here a decade, there a millennium. So does development: the authors date the genesis of a state-society balance in England to around 600 CE, but “its economic offshoot,” the industrial revolution, did not get underway until the eighteenth century (p. 194). This implies that in cross section we may not observe a correlation between a society’s position vis-à-vis the corridor and either liberty or prosperity.

The authors consider three types of domination: the chronic insecurity of life without a state, subordination to a Despot Leviathan that has emancipated itself from society’s control, and captivity in the “cage of norms,” the complex of taboos, ascribed status, and nonmarket exchange that regulates behavior in many traditional societies. Liberty prevails only in the space between the Absent Leviathan, the Despot Leviathan, and the cage of norms, where the state’s power and society’s capacity to shackle (or better, harness) it grow together. This is a dynamic balance of power, a virtuous circle of state–society interaction. As the state’s power waxes, it gradually pries open the cage, transforming society in ways that help the latter to organize itself and participate in politics. For instance, kin-based social structures, which do not permit people “to freely form and join any sort of association that could help them mobilize and monitor political power,” cannot effectively shackle the Leviathan (p. 58). As the state loosens the bonds of clan and caste, then, it creates its own counterpart, an assertive and mobilized society. Confident in its ability to keep Leviathan in check, society in turn demands more from it and enhances its capabilities. This, for Acemoglu and Robinson, is the best-case scenario. Much of *TNC* is devoted to exploring the circumstances that historically have set this virtuous circle in motion and those that have stalled it.

To evaluate this book’s global argument, it is worth discussing the differences between *TNC* and *Why Nations Fail*. *TNC* contains many ideas which readers of the authors’ earlier work will find familiar, notably the contention that a Despot Leviathan cannot sustain the “good” (“inclusive”) economic institutions needed for development, such as secure property rights. New for the authors is the acknowledgement that state and society are mutually constitutive and that the state’s developmental tasks often include *transforming* society in ways that foster economic initiative. These are important lessons, albeit long familiar to political scientists and economic historians. To clarify, the issue is not the “size” of government; the authors have never advocated a minimal state. It is instead, as Bardhan (2016) suggests, whether the conventional prescription of a “strong but limited” state fully captures the political prerequisites of development. On the whole, *TNC* remains faithful to this prescription, but the aforementioned elements are a welcome indication that prevailing winds in the study of development may finally be shifting.

Ultimately, the authors remain wedded to a largely conventional understanding of development, wherein the main task is to create an institutional environment that supports productive investment and innovation rather than rent seeking. The idea is to align individual returns to productive economic activity with their social returns—above all, by enforcing property rights. *TNC* stresses that all subjects, not just elites, ought to have property rights; yet the book treats such rights as part of a package of “good” institutions rather than as an immensely variable historical category. This is apparent, for instance, in the authors’ association of regimes of labor coercion—serfdom and slavery—with the cage of norms (pp. 51, 178). But in many of the societies in which they have existed historically, serfdom and slavery were no mere “norms” but

instead highly developed systems of property rights, enforced by the state. From this it is evident that “secure” property rights are not always a boon to development. Development also presupposes the existence of some agency that is authorized to *override* certain classes of property rights when these become fetters on growth. Representative assemblies and other institutional constraints on state power may help to enforce property rights, and even to facilitate the abolition of obsolete rights, but their existence is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for either. Nor are they enough to underwrite the baseline political stability that supports a positive perception of risk, and yet without such stability, the claim that property rights are secure is meaningless—however “good” the institutions may be. These conjectures raise questions: what kinds of institutions, for instance, are needed to support the exchanges of property rights which development sometimes requires? These questions, and not just that of how to “shackle” the Leviathan, are what scholars of development ought to be asking.

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Developing global leaders: Insights from African case studies

Eva Jordan | Bettina Ng'weno and Helen Spencer-Oatey

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Developing Global Leaders: Insights from African Case Studies innovates in several respects throughout its examination of leadership in Africa. First, although many studies on leadership in the continent focus on one country or region, the work examines leadership from across several different regions. Secondly, unlike most studies on leadership in the continent, the book analyzes leaders and leadership experience in Africa outside the context of politics by focusing on business leaders, civic leaders, women leaders, and youth. In the same vein, the study broadens its survey of female leaders within the realm of politics by further discussing nonpolitical women leaders, young women, and the youth leaders.

The book introduces an empirical research methodology not only by selecting respondents and interviewees, but also through data analysis, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques of data collection. The work is organized into three main parts. The first part of the book constitutes the foundation comprising three conceptual chapters, including the interrogation of the key concepts and frameworks on leadership. The second part examines the research methodology employed by the researchers, while the last part of the series focuses on five case studies, as well the implications and application of their associated research findings.